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**AIRGRAM**

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE

INFO: CARACAS, THE HAGUE, LONDON, PARAMARIBO, USUN,  
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FROM : Amembassy GEORGETOWN

DATE: February 6, 1968

SUBJECT : Guyana/Surinam Border Dispute

REF : Georgetown's 778

Pol 32-1 Guyana

COPY FILE-PBR

SUGGESTED DISTRIBUTION

1. Enclosed is the text of the letter sent by Guyana Minister of State S.S. Ramphal to Foreign Minister Luns of the Netherlands which continues the exchange of views on the Guyana/Surinam border dispute and replies to Luns' letter of January 22. Ramphal provided the letter with the understanding it would be regarded as secret.

2. Also enclosed are copies of a "White Paper" publicly released by the Government of Guyana containing a history of the demarcation of the Guyana/Surinam border on the Kutari-Corentyne and stating Guyana's case for sovereignty over the disputed area. The GOG felt compelled to issue the paper because of the conflicting view of facts contained in the public statements of Surinam's Minister-President Johan Pengel.

CARLSON

Enclosures:

1-GOG Foreign Office Note  
SEA:9/21/1 II - mat2-White Paper Guyana-Suriname Boundary  
Dept (5) Info Addressees (1 each)

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Enclosure 1.

Government of Guyana  
Foreign Office Note  
SEA: 9/21/1 II

This document consists of.....<sup>5</sup>.....pages

Copy No,.....<sup>1</sup>.....of.....<sup>7</sup>.....copies. Series A.

2 February, 1968.

Your Excellency,

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of Your Excellency's letter of January 22, 1968, in reply to mine of December 28, 1967.

It is the case that in the discussions held in London on June 23, 1966, between a delegation representing the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and a delegation from Guyana, the first named delegation stressed that the area in question was part of Surinam, and therefore of the territory of the Kingdom.

It is also the case that this view had been expressed by Your Excellency's Government on the eve of Guyana's Independence. But it is equally true that this view had at all material times been categorically rejected by the British Government, by the Guyanese Government and, more particularly, by the Guyanese delegation at the London meeting to which Your Excellency has referred. Moreover, it is also the case that the rejection by the British Government of that view had on more than one occasion been publicly accepted by the responsible authorities of the Netherlands Government who repeatedly recognized the Kutari as the boundary.

Your Excellency will also recall that in accordance with this recognition of the Kutari as the boundary, the tri-junction point, that is to say, the point at which the boundary between Surinam and British Guiana met the boundary between these two territories and Brazil, was duly fixed with the full and active concurrence of the Netherlands Government. In this regard Your Excellency may wish to refer to the map of the tri-junction point which was duly signed by the representatives of Great Britain, the Netherlands and Brazil, the Netherlands representative being Admiral Mayser.

This is hardly the place for me to burden Your Excellency with further evidence of acts whereby the Netherlands Government

His Excellency Dr. J.M.A.H. Luns,  
Minister for Foreign Affairs,  
Kingdom of the Netherlands,  
The Hague.

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accorded clear recognition of the Kutari as the boundary and of the New River Triangle as being an integral part of British Guiana and therefore now of Guyana. I am aware, of course, that the authorities in Surinam have been advancing contrary claims within recent times, but in view of the foregoing I do not appreciate how it is that the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands can consider that there is any just or reasonable basis for these claims.

The present standpoint of Your Excellency's Government is not, in the opinion of the Government of Guyana, supported by the Agreement between the Governors of Berbice and Surinam to which Your Excellency has referred. In particular, but without going into details, I wish to state that that Agreement is no authority for regarding the western bank as an international frontier; nor is it the case, as Your Excellency states, that the western bank of the Corentyne has been recognized as the boundary ever since. Your Excellency may wish to refer in this regard to the statement made in February 1913 in the First Chamber of the States General by the Netherlands Minister for Foreign Affairs in which he said that the boundary was formed by the Corentyne and its upper course, the Kutari-Curuni, and added:

"To this water course the ordinary rules of international law obtaining in respect of joint boundary rivers are wholly applicable".

Your Excellency states that Schomburgk was in error when in 1843 he regarded the Curuni-Kutari as the origin of the Corentyne and that the error was discovered by Barrington Brown in 1871, but that the Netherlands Government did not become aware of it until about 1890. Your Excellency is perhaps not aware of the fact that in Atlases published in the Netherlands after that date the boundary was shown along the Kutari. It is true that in 1899 a map was published in Surinam by W. L. Loth, the Surinam Government Landmeter, in which for the first time the boundary was shown along the New River. I observe, however, that the same W. L. Loth had published a map in 1888 with the approval of the Governor of Surinam, His Excellency H.J. Smidt, in which the boundary was shown as lying along the Kutari. It is not, I think, without significance that in this map the New River was also shown and with an inscription to the effect that it had been discovered by Barrington Brown in 1872.

As to whether or not the New River is the real source of the Corentyne, the geographical features to which Your Excellency has referred are in the opinion of the Government of Guyana far from

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conclusive of the question, and it seems that past Netherlands Governments have been of the same opinion. You may wish in this regard to refer to the statement made on April 28, 1925, in the Second Chamber of the States General by the Netherlands Minister of the Colonies in which he said that Dr. Yzerman's statement to the Netherlands Royal Geographical Society showed that the "basin of the Curuni is considerably more extensive than that of the New River", and added: "I doubt somewhat whether the pronouncement that the New River, and not the Cutari, really forms the upper reaches of the Corentyne River, which in this matter is the main point, may be accepted with certainty".

But even if it were to be assumed (which the Government of Guyana denies) that the New River is the true source of the Corentyne, this does not in the opinion of the Government of Guyana affect the issue in any degree, for the position adopted both by the British Government and by past Netherlands Governments has been that the boundary has lain along the Kutari ever since 1843 and that the New River Triangle has ever since been under the positive and exclusive possession and occupation of the Government of Great Britain and, therefore, now of the Government of Guyana.

The Government of Guyana does indeed retain the opinion of its predecessor, the Government of the United Kingdom, that the Corentyne-Kutari forms the boundary, and for the foregoing reasons it finds it consistent with international law so to do. Indeed, my Government is under no doubt whatsoever that it has full legal title to the New River Triangle and to a boundary along the Corentyne-Kutari. I cannot, therefore, accept the suggestion in Your Excellency's letter that the Oronoque Camp in the New River Triangle is in Surinam territory.

It is also the case that although this position is at present challenged the status quo under which the Government of Guyana and its predecessor have exercised exclusive authority over the area in question has at all material times been respected by Your Excellency's Government. You yourself were good enough to mention at your meeting in April, 1966, with Lord Walston of the British Foreign Office that Surinam had shown great restraint in not exercising acts of sovereignty in the New River Triangle, and Dr. Einaar, Minister Plenipotentiary of Surinam at The Hague, who was present, endorsed Your Excellency's views.

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In the circumstances I am not certain whether I should understand Your Excellency's letter as signifying an assumption by Your Excellency's Government of responsibility for disturbing the status quo through the act of the Government of Surinam in sending its personnel into the area without first securing the approval of the Government of Guyana, and for the same reason I am unable to appreciate why the peaceful eviction of such personnel by the competent authorities should be a cause of surprise to Your Excellency. The Government of Guyana does wish "to avoid action which must inevitably inflame passions and impair" efforts to find a peaceful solution, but it does not consider itself in consequence obliged to submit to unauthorized incursions into its territory or any other acts disturbing the status quo.

I share Your Excellency's conviction that only peaceful means must be used to resolve the present differences, but this must in the opinion of my Government be based on respect for the status quo. In this regard Your Excellency's attention has already been drawn to various belligerent pronouncements by the authorities in Surinam which all but amount to a de facto declaration of war against Guyana. I am encouraged by our common approach to ask that steps be taken by the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to prevent any further disturbance of the status quo by the Surinam Government, whether by the sending in of unauthorized personnel into the territory of Guyana or otherwise.

So far as the presence of Guyanese policemen in the New River Triangle is concerned, this is a normal act of sovereignty on the part of the Government of Guyana, and is dependent on the day to day assessment of the overall security needs of the country. In this context I invite Your Excellency's attention to the presence of Netherlands and Surinam military and police personnel on the island in the Corentyne River near Point Rightabout - an island on the very boundary with Guyana and one on which a substantial airstrip has been built. Your Excellency has referred to a helicopter landing ground being prepared at Camp Oronoque. Such an act if it were to be done would of course be entirely within the competence of the Guyana Government.

Your Excellency has also referred to a boat house which is being built out into the waters of the Corentyne without the consent of the Government of Surinam having been applied for or received. The construction represents the addition of a small shed along the passage way to the Springlands wharf which is on the left bank near to the mouth of the Corentyne River. It is

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really a miniscule operation as Your Excellency may see from the attached plan, and is entirely within the curtilage of the previously existing wharf. In these circumstances, the Government of Guyana does not consider that the consent of the Surinam Government was required for the construction of the shed.

I wish to make it clear, however, that in recognizing any authority of Your Excellency's Government in this matter I base myself on the understanding previously reached whereby the British Government made a concession to the Netherlands Government of the former's rights to a frontier on the thalweg in return for the abandonment by the Netherlands Government of any suggestion that the old established frontier along the Kutari should be disturbed. In the view of my Government this understanding, clinched as it has been by the subsequent fixing of the tri-junction point, is immutable. In saying this, however, I wish to enter a caveat in respect of British rights of user over the river (to which Guyana has now succeeded) which were in no way affected by that understanding and were intended to be safeguarded by the boundary Treaty which was fully agreed upon and all but signed when the war intervened.

Subject, therefore, to respect for the status quo, the Government of Guyana continues prepared to discuss all questions relating to the boundary with Your Excellency's Government, and also agrees that a good starting point is to continue the discussions which were begun on June 23, 1966, in London. At the end of that meeting the Dutch delegation had proposed, as Your Excellency has mentioned, that the talks be continued at a later date. The Government of Guyana had accordingly been looking forward to hearing further about this proposal, but unfortunately no word came either about this or about the proposed exchange of diplomatic notes relating to the proceedings at that meeting.

The Government of Guyana remains convinced that it will be to the advantage of all concerned that the present differences be resolved in a peaceful and friendly manner, and I am accordingly glad to inform Your Excellency that it is prepared to continue the talks begun in London and to do so at a time and place to be mutually agreed.

With renewed assurances of my highest consideration,

(S.S. Ramphal)

Attorney General & Minister of State.

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